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**Sìthichean Mara: The Reconstruction of Scottish
Folklore and Representation of Contemporary Society
in Kirsty Logan's *The Gloaming***

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Abstract

Kirsty Logan's novel *The Gloaming* (2018) is the result of mixing the essence of Scottish culture and the process of reinterpreting folk tales. She creates a world in which reality and fantasy have no boundaries. Magic creatures intertwine with contemporary concerns such as love, family relationships and identity. In this dissertation I argue that Logan used the traditional motifs common in popular tales to represent contemporary society. Moreover, she appropriates the techniques introduced in the 20th century by authors such as Angela Carter to deconstruct these stories. Little research has been done on Logan's novel; however, I will rely on critical analysis carried on retellers such as Angela Carter to understand the techniques employed in the reinterpretation of motifs. I will focus on Scottish traditional tales which serve as an inspiration to the author and as the basis to the context in *The Gloaming*. In relation to this, special attention will be paid to the motifs deconstructed in the novel and the new meanings delivered.

Keywords: Kirsty Logan, *The Gloaming*, Folklore, Scotland, Fairytales, Sea, Queer Love, Female Representation.

0. Introduction

Stories transmitted orally from generation to generation are the oldest form of literature that exists. These tales serve as a connection with the imagination and history of the society in which they survive. Each country has its own folklore tradition, which includes stories and tales. These usually represent concerns to which the community had no answer for. In Scotland, the region this dissertation will focus on, many of these folktales have a strong connection with water, as it is mainly surrounded by the sea and there are many lochs.

These myths and fantastic stories are the basis of Kirsty Logan's novel *The Gloaming*. As a Scot she grew up among tales about mythical creatures and the sea, and these have shaped her narrative. As a student of literature and creative writing, Logan has devoted her adult life to shaping a career in literature. Her first steps were done with a collection of short stories called *The Rental Heart and Other Fairytales* (2014), which gained her recognition by being awarded with the 2013 Scott Prize for Short Stories, among others. Her first novel, called *The Gracekeepers* (2015), explored her passion for retold fairytales in an extended form. All her works share the same basis, which is the influence of Scottish folklore along with her admiration for female authors of the 20th century who worked on the retellings of tales. The influence of her Scots origin is also reflected on the title of the novel this dissertation focuses on. *Gloaming* is a word with Scottish heritage which is a synonym for 'twilight'.

Angela Carter was one of these authors that deeply inspired her. Logan became hugely interested in the reinterpretation of the traditional stories for children that Carter reassembled in order to analyse contemporary issues. In her novel *The Gloaming*, Logan explores issues such as queer love, family conflicts and identity through what may seem at first a real setting, but one that is actually full of fantasy. The novel evolves around the Ross family, a ballerina and a boxer, who decided to move to a remote island in the

Hebrides to safely raise their three children: Mara, Islay and Bee. However, this island it is not what they expected, for example, those whose life is about to end, gradually turn to stone on the cliff. Additionally, in exchange for Signe and Peter's life in the island, the sea claims something in return that shakes their family, Bee's life and body. After this tragic experience the Ross family deals with grief in different ways, and it is during this process of grief that Mara meets Pearl, a mermaid performer who will destabilize, once again, her life. The novel unravels the growth Mara goes through to become an adult while discovering sexual desire, the nature of family relationships and the development of one's identity.

Due to the recent publication of the novel, little analysis and research have been done on it. However, there are precedents of research on the retelling of fairy tales, mainly focused on Angela Carter, Logan's primary influence. Additionally, various collections on Scottish myths and tales help understand which are the stories that marked the author when composing her novel. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse how Logan's narrative introduces the traditional structures of folktales to construct a contemporary novel that deals with modern dilemmas of society. In order to do so, I will focus on the evolution of folk tales and how this form was re-established during the 20th century. Next, I will focus on Angela Carter, who not only is Logan's main influence, but also one of the most important retellers of fairytales. An outlook on her stories and the processes she used to mould the tales to meet her concerning will be carried out to identify which of those have been used by Logan. Following, I will establish which characteristics common in fairy-tale retellings have been put into *The Gloaming*. Finally, I will provide an analysis of the deconstruction of tales and motifs Logan carries out in the novel in order to depict contemporary concerns

1. Narrative

1.1. Retelling the Fairy Tales

Fairy tales have circulated since the beginning of human speech and are usually connected to stories for children, mere entertainment. However, tales served as a tool to instruct on social duties and as an explanation of natural phenomena (Brooke, 2004: 84). These started as orally transmitted tales which eventually were put onto paper by some authors in the 19th century. This change from oral to written created a distinction between folktales and fairy tales, allowing the written tales to enjoy recognition, whereas the oral folktales were regarded as inferior literature. Despite this, the written tales are just an evolution of the traditional folk tales and it is a characteristic of the development of society. This transition reflects the progress of society “from an oral, illiterate culture to one that is both literate and literary” (Doughty, 2002: 357). Nonetheless, what is for some the essence of tales was lost when these were printed. Folktales are adapted by the teller in order to suit the audience or the setting where he or she is. Once the story is printed there is no allowance for modifications. The stories written by the Grimm brothers in the 19th century were the result of the folk tales that circulated and the expectations put into the tales by the readership, who demanded “certain kinds of structure, topoi, motifs and characters” (Doughty, 2002: 358). These expectations are the basis of our conception of a fairy tale, and partly, the reason why folktales have long been considered basic types (Henderson, 2013: 2).

However, in the 20th century, tales gained certain popularity (Binney, 2018: 2) amongst novelists who experimented with the old forms of fairy tales to analyse modern issues. These authors focused on what was defined as the retelling of Fairy tales with a specific interest in addressing 20th century concerns. In order to do so, they modified the main characteristics of tales, allowing them to convey different messages through a well-known story. By using the folkloric narrative, the new tales show “the aesthetics and

preoccupations” (Binney, 2018: 2) of the contemporary world and bring the tales from the past to the present.

One of the best well known authors on this area was Angela Carter, a British author from the 20th century. She took the traditional stories we are told as kids and re-wrote them in order to analyse topics such as sexuality and feminism. Her short stories became very popular, as she took famous tales and gave them an empowering sense for women. One of the most important collections of short stories she wrote was *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) in which she revisited stories such as “Beauty and the Beast” and “Little Red Riding Hood”. Carter took the patriarchal norms (Lappas, 1996: 2) that are present in fairy tales and assigned them to powerful and complex female characters. Tales were usually about saving the innocent damsel-in-distress, but these were actually hiding messages of sexual desire from masculinity to the figure of the woman and patriarchal ideals of feminine compliance. The red hood that she was wearing was a representation of female sexuality, through the colour of the blood that illustrated menstruation, and therefore the awakening of female sexuality. Carter takes these messages and portrays them as they really are, the usage of woman for sexual desire despite her unwillingness to do so. By doing this she depicts the charming prince as a rapist, which does not serve just as a critique of the old messages but also as a judgement of “the current relations between the sexes” (Lappas, 1996: 2).

Generally, the traditional fairy tales gave women submissive roles, in which they were no more than daughters, virginal victims or witches. Their role was to satisfy the patriarchal conventions that subjected them. In her re-tellings, Carter constructed “a feminist subjectivity defined by activity rather than passivity” (Brooke, 2004: 68). One of the literary tools Carter used in order to confront the patriarchal stereotypes about women present in fairy tales was parody (Brooke, 2004: 69), through which, Carter criticised the conventions traditionally expected in this genre. Carter’s Beast is not

presented as a powerful creature you should fear, instead the dominant traditions are subverted in her stories as “Beauty ‘frightens’ him and the Beast is ‘helpless’ in her presence”(Brooke, 2004: 73). The masculine perspective dominant in tales always presented the girl as beautiful, docile and tender. Therefore, as an individual, she had no power over her future or decisions, rather, her aim was to please those masculine figures around her, the father or the lover. Carter transforms this by giving Beauty some freedom that allows her to control her decisions (Brooke, 2004: 75). Although Beauty never leaves the role of the obedient girl, the author’s ironic language criticises this behaviour. Additionally, this narrative does not only prevent women from being an independent person, but also shows a violent tendency towards female characters. In her re-tellings, “Carter highlights the violence that accompanies [...] the beauty in gender and sexual constructions” (Brooke, 2004: 84), and by addressing it she aims for a change in social conventions which still prevail. The stereotypes represented in fairy tales do correspond to the contemporary reality, and by challenging and re-writing them Carter tries to create an impact on the relationship between genders and the representations of women. Her characters move from that innocent girl towards a heroine who controls her decisions and life.

Angela Carter and other female re-tellers of tales became an inspiration to Kirsty Logan’s narrative. She directed her stories towards the retelling of fairy tales through which contemporary topics such as female power and queer love could be discussed. In the following section, I will discuss the techniques common in 20th century fairy tale re-tellers incorporated by Logan in her novel *The Gloaming*.

1.2. Kirsty Logan

Logan was raised among stories about the Scottish seaside which became part of her narrative. In various interviews she has recognised how “water-based Scottish tales”

(Logan, 2018) have been her main influences when composing a story. Although their presence is not always conscious, having grown up with them makes it almost impossible for her to create a story without any cultural references to these tales. This connection with fairy and folk tales, and her profound admiration to authors such as Angela Carter and Marina Warner lead her to base her novels on the reconstruction of the traditional Scottish stories.

When she discovered the dark re-tellings of traditional tales, Kirsty Logan saw the opportunity to use the traditional forms and topics to convey new realities based on feminism and queer love. She decided to adapt the traditional Scottish folktales to transmit contemporary dilemmas. In order to do so, she took as a reference these female writers from the 20th century which gave “new energy into traditional tales and motifs by deconstructing and transforming some of the core elements that support such stories” (Logan, 2018).

She deconstructs the popular forms to reflect on contemporary issues and the lack of feminism these have. One of the main characteristics of Logan’s narrative is the way in which reality and fantasy intertwine, something that Carter also introduced into her stories. Moving away from the fantasy common in fairy tales, Logan creates a fluidity between reality and fantasy. While the setting may seem at first a real one, now and then, fantastic elements are mentioned with “no particular reaction either in the characters or the reader” (Binney, 2018: 16). *The Gloaming* island’s main feature is that those who die, do so by turning into stone figures on a cliff, however this is not presented as something uncanny, but as an ordinary part of reality. Some critics have defined her style as magic realism, as Logan introduces the mythical elements that defy logic in an ordinary setting (Jensen, 2018) and these are not questioned by the characters, and neither by the reader who is absorbed by the narrative style. The author herself admitted that she likes “to use fantasy elements in a more metaphorical sense, rather than them being the whole point of

the story” (Logan, 2018). Through this style she can display an alternative to reality that serves as a mirror to explore 21st century issues.

This intersection between fantasy and reality allows the author to introduce to these traditional folktales the concerns of the 21st century while maintaining the long-established forms. Tales tend to be timeless and universal, but one of the main characteristics of re-writing folk stories is to give this story a specific moment in history and location. By doing so, the circumstances change and so does the outcome of the story. In *The Gloaming* we are not given a specific date, however the narration leaves the reader with the sense of a contemporary setting, despite the magical island in which the story unravels. As for the location, the island is not given a name, but a Scottish island is mentioned “the Isle of Eynhallow” (Logan, 2018: 221) as a comparison with the island where Mara and her family live. It is logical, due to the author’s connection with Scotland and the mentioning of “Celtic land” (Logan, 2018: 221) to assume that the story takes place in one of the Hebrides.

One of the other reasons why Logan may have chosen to use the deconstruction of folktales is the fact that through these forms, her messages can be transmitted globally:

A fairy tale is a story that resonates through time and place. The stories deal with tropes, so the mother of a fairy tale is every mother, a broken heart is every broken heart, a lost child is every lost child. The truths of a fairy tale are relevant to us all, no matter our specific circumstances. (Wimhurst and Dastur, 2019)

The problems and experiences narrated in *The Gloaming*, despite the fantastic elements, are ones that the reader can feel reflected in. The issues portrayed are familiar to the readers, as they are commonly present in our realities, as Logan points out. The grief of a family who have lost a loved one, despite the fantastic elements that surround his death, is the loss of any family. The process from childhood to adulthood and breaking the connection with your family is a universal process, and using the tale form, Logan can

make the reader reflect on these situations while at the same time addressing societal problems of the real world. Dealing with grief, family relationships, sexual discovery and queer love are some of the topics which are dealt with in *The Gloaming*, universal concerns and human emotions considered through fantasy.

2. Deconstructing the Tales

As mentioned in previous sections, the basis of Logan's narrative are the Scottish folktales stories based on the sea. In the following sections I will mention some of the tales that we can foresee in *The Gloaming*, and next an analysis on how these tales have been modified to meet Logan's interest will be carried out. Finally, we will deconstruct how the main motifs on fairy tales have been rearranged to express new meanings. As a consequence of the absence of critical research on the novel, I will present my own hypothesis based on the knowledge acquired during the investigation carried out for this dissertation.

2.1 Scottish Influences

Stories about water and sea creatures are very common in Scottish folklore, and, these are the ones to which Logan feels drawn to. She feels especially interested in selkies and the power and connection between sea and land. The fluidity of the sea is transferred to the narrative and marks the progression of the events in the novel.

Any region in Scotland is mainly surrounded by sea, and additionally there are hundreds of lochs in the region. This is the reason why there is such a strong connection in the Caledonian region with water. For this reason, many of the folktales transmitted from generation to generation in the area deal with sea creatures such as kelpies, mermaids or selkies. In order to be precise, there is the need to clarify the meaning of the terms selkie and mermaid, as these are used throughout the novel and can lead to

confusion. A mermaid is usually conceived as a creature half-woman, half-fish which lives in the sea and commonly has the gift of a charming voice that leads sailors to death. On the other hand, selkies, the Scot word for “grey seal”, are common creatures in Scottish mythology. These creatures are capable of changing their form from seal to human by taking their skin off. However, Kirsty Logan in her novel *The Gloaming* uses the term “selkie” to describe Pearl, who works as a mermaid performer. Therefore, it seems like Logan merges the terms selkie and mermaid to refer to the sea creature.

Many stories circulate in Scottish seaside towns in which young ladies disappear from the beach because they have been seduced and taken by selkies into the sea. One of the most well-known tales in Scottish folklore is “The Seal Wife”. Logan introduces this tale as one of the stories the Ross kids are told when growing up and that has a great impact in Mara’s perception of love and life. The story narrates how a man was marvelled by the looks of a selkie woman and to get her love the man steals her selkie skin, so she can never go back to the sea and has to stay with him. Over the years they create a family, however, one of the kids eventually finds the selkie skin that the man was hiding and shows the mother. In Signe’s version, Mara’s mother, the selkie decides to hide the skin again and stay with her family because she loves them. Nonetheless, in the popular story, the selkie takes the skin and goes back to the sea, because despite her love for her family she needs to go back to where she belongs. This tale resonates through the entire novel as a representation of Mara’s perception of life, and the discovery of the real ending has an impact on her mindset.

An essential aspect of the novel is the fact that in Mara’s island those who are about to die turn into stone figures to stay on the cliff forever. There are in Scotland various stories and locations where stones figures have been given different meanings. The Callanish Stones in the Isle of Lewis are said to be the stone figures of some giants which were petrified when trying to save the Lewis population from Christianity. There are also

the Machrie Moor stone circles in the Isle of Arran. These are said to have been arranged by fairies who liked to spend their time by throwing pebbles which ended up forming monoliths and stone circles (Coulson, 2017)

Many references to Scottish tales are made in the novel, however these are not mentioned directly, instead, they serve as the basis from which Logan constructs Mara's island and family. The significance of selkies and stone figures will be analysed deeply in the following sections, alongside other topics and motifs present and connected with tales and present in the novel.

2.2 Main topics deconstructed

Fairy and folk tales share a set of common motifs and topics. These were usually used to transmit moral messages through fantastic stories, to teach society about the dangers and consequences of their actions. However, as these stories developed, and the phallogocentric vision took control of them different messages were shared. Kirsty Logan takes the main motifs prevailing in this genre and challenges the traditional messages portrayed. In the following sections, I will analyse the interpretation Logan made of the most common motifs in folklore tales and how she adapted them in *The Gloaming*.

2.2.1 Family Relationships

Family relationships are a centre motif in popular tales, however these are usually presented as “dysfunctional units in which parents and step-parents are neglectful to the point of murder and sibling rivalry” (Carter, 1990, xix). As we will see, Logan confronts this representation of family bonds to create new ones and subvert the traditional conceptions. One of the main characteristics on this genre is the conflict between daughter and mother, or stepmother. A tension between the two females is usually portrayed through the image of an evil mother. In the case of Snow White, the stepmother plans to

kill her because she is jealous of her beauty. Ideas of jealousy towards the daughter for her beauty or age were shared by this phallogentric tales, which promoted an image of a bitter woman. This is due to the concept that women were only of use when young and beautiful, and once they no longer were these, they became the evil witch. Moreover, the aim of the young demoiselle was to get a husband, and by doing so the figure of the mother disappears. It is difficult to find a tale in which the figure of the mother is not absent, as in in “Beauty and the Beast”, or on the other hand, that represents the figure of the villain, like in Snow white or Cinderella.

Logan, in her novel, presents a different relationship between mother and daughter. Despite not being an absent mother, there are moments in which Signe is presented as a figure who opposes Mara’s happiness, therefore, not completely moving away from the traditional constructions. Nonetheless, this opposition is not triggered by jealousy, but homophobia. After Bee’s death, Signe loses part of her identity, but it is not until Pearl’s appearance that she adopts a bitter attitude. She opposes this relationship because it is difficult for her to accept that her little girl has grown up and is lesbian, but also because Pearl is the reason her daughter leaves them and the island. Signe is not comfortable with letting a stranger into her family and to have her reality shaken by her daughter’s relationship with a girl. This feeling of opposition towards the relationship is also shared by the other female in the family, Islay. Rivalry between sisters is also “one of the cornerstones of patriarchy” (Duncker, 2002: 75). Cinderella is harassed by her two jealous stepsisters and there are, I believe, no examples or a feeling of sisterhood in fairy tales. Mara’s sister dislikes Pearl from the first moment she meets her, “she didn’t enjoy hating people on sight, but it seemed pretty obvious that this girl was the reason for Mara’s happiness” (Logan, 2018: 184). Their attitude shows a reluctance to accept Mara’s homosexuality, as for her previous boyfriend the whole family showed approval despite the irrelevance of his existence. He was not given an exact name, as people often forgot

it, because he didn't cause any impact on other people's life. Nonetheless, he was openly welcomed to the Ross house with no reluctance. Usually, what it is considered to be more respectable tends to be the boring version of society. On the other hand, Pearl, who Mara is in love with and seems to care about her, is not accepted by either of the two females in the family. Through this representation, Logan takes the popular conception of female rivalry but redefines it. Instead of showing females who envy each other, she portrays a contemporary issue, the acceptance of homosexuality not only by family, but this entity as a representation of the whole society. Logan criticises the opposition and the reluctant attitude shown to homosexual couples in contemporary life.

2.2.2 Female Image in Fairy Tales

Beauty is also a very important aspect in tales. As mentioned in the previous section, women were only useful while young and pretty. Moreover, there is a lot of emphasis put on the description of the female characters in female tales, as the beautiful girls are the ones who get married, and the ugly ones are characterised by bitterness. In the Grimm brothers' version of Cinderella, she is portrayed as a flawless girl who gets married with the prince, while her stepsisters, described as ugly and evil, have their eyes pecked out by birds as their tragic ending. This shows a clear connection to the misogynist control over the narrations of popular tales which promoted "women's rivalry under its control" (Brooke, 2004: 72). In her novel, Logan opposes this representation of female characters purely based on misogynist female representations. After Bee's death, Mara is left with a big scar in her face which serves a constant reminder of the tragic event. This is a physical aspect that affects her self-esteem as she doesn't consider herself beautiful: "Her scar ran in bracket from the outer corner of her left eye to the corner of her mouth, splitting her cheek" (Logan, 2018: 71). She feels uncomfortable when being observed, especially when Pearl is the one looking at her as she feels ashamed for that

mark: “Pearl would see the ugliness of her, and even though she knew she couldn’t be beautiful she still wanted to be beautiful for Pearl” (Logan, 2018: 90). This connects Mara with reality. Young women have been taught through tales and society that their appearance is the most important aspect of their personality, and this is translated into Mara’s repudiation of her own appearance. Despite what idealisations may promote, the truth is that no one is flawless. Therefore, Logan creates a main character who is closer to reality, as she is not a reconstruction of patriarchal idealised representations of females. This also allows a connection with the contemporary reader who may be subject to the same expectations.

If Logan followed the common traits in folktales, Mara should have been regarded as the ugly sister who was destined to spend her life alone. However, Logan reverses this tradition and provides Mara with a love story. On the other hand, Islay, who was always considered the beautiful sister, doesn’t enjoy happiness when she leaves the island, nor when she comes back. “Islay fell in love and out of love. She worked many jobs she hated and one she liked. She got bored, and she moved on” (Logan, 2018: 109). Logan decides to exchange the roles of the beautiful sister and the ugly one, in order to prove that flawless physical appearance is not going to condition your happiness as tales used to promote. Mara, physically marked by the events of her life, is the Ross sister who achieves a relationship in which she feels loved. However, Logan doesn’t completely escape from tradition, as she provides Islay with certain resentful attitude towards her sister. She is envious of the happiness her sister enjoys and attacks her physical appearance: “Mara had been no great beauty even before she got that bloody great scar across her face. Islay loved her sister, obviously, because she had to love her. But why had Pearl chosen her? Why would anyone choose Mara if they didn’t have to?” (Logan, 2018: 191). Islay questions why her sister had someone who chose to love her. Instead, she didn’t have anyone who loved her despite her beauty. Despite not moving away from the negative

representations of female bonding, Logan's reinterpretation of the physical appearance allows a broader audience to relate with Mara, who at last is just a young girl finding her identity and growing up. The traditional representations of women's appearance ruled by masculine perceptions of beauty are eliminated thus to introduce different feminine models rarely before presented in tales.

2.2.3 Representation of Selkies in Pearl

Selkies are very common creatures in Scottish folklore. As mentioned in previous sections, these creatures are seals that when on shore can emulate the form of humans. This ability to change their appearance has resulted in many different tales. In some cases, seals trick humans to get them onto their kingdom under the sea. In others, the selkie is tricked to stay on land with humans with no possibility of going back to the water. Regarding their character's trait, there has been a change in recent years. In late versions of tales, selkies are regarded as "benign and very shy" (Zámečníková, 2017: 4). However, in traditional versions, these creatures were characterised as beings which tricked young girls and took them under the sea. Logan mixes both ideas with the different perspectives Mara and Signe have of Pearl.

Pearl's works as a mermaid performer, which clearly is a metaphor that connects the fantastic world of tales with reality. When she confesses her profession, it is first received as a magical thing, to be a mythical creature. However, this supernatural effect disappears when she describes what it consists of: "It's like underwater acrobatics, but wearing a mermaid tail" (Logan, 2018: 105). She removes the supernatural or idealised ideas to describe what for her is a job. Despite her curious profession, Pearl seems to be the character that introduces reality to the Ross family fantasy: "Not a real mermaid [...] because, you know, mythical and all that" (Logan, 2018: 105). Mara doesn't question that she is a mermaid, nonetheless, she has been raised with fairy tales in a magical island: "A

mermaid? Really?” (Logan, 2018: 105). Moreover, Pearl is the only character who really points out the uncanny elements of their life, such as the house: “If fairy tales were real [...] this is where they would happen” (Logan, 2018: 167). For Mara and the rest of her family living in an enormous house whose entrance is made of shark’s teeth is part of her reality, but it is not ordinary: “The front door, which was usually to be avoided because an enormous shark jaw was hung, open, in the doorway, and you had to walk through it to get outside.” (Logan, 2018: 12). Her appearance represents a shock for the family because it means a direct contact with the real world, outside the stories they were told. Pearl doesn’t consider the island a sacred place, instead she conceives it as a prison that keeps you from getting to know the world. Additionally, Pearl has no family, in complete contrast to Mara’s world in which her family has such an important role in her life. This is one of the links Logan uses to connect fantasy and reality, in the narrative, as Pearl serves as a tie between the real world and the magic island.

Despite all these traits in which she is responsible for mentioning all the bizarre elements in Mara’s life, Pearl still represents one of the main connections with traditional tales and this is seen from Signe’s perspective. Through Signe’s eyes, Pearl represents the evil creature traditionally feared by popular folklore. As mentioned, one of the representations of selkies is as creatures that manipulated girls using “seductive powers” (Zámecníková, 2017: 8) to take them away from their families. For Signe, Pearl is this mythical creature that is going to take her daughter away from her: “The selkie was taking her daughter, was drowning her, her bones would disappear under the silt and Signe would never see her child again.” (Logan, 2018, 154). As part of this fantastic world, Signe believes Pearl is taking her daughter to the selkie’s kingdom under the sea, but in reality, Pearl is going to take Mara away from the island and from her family. Moreover, Pearl serves as a bridge from adolescence to adulthood for Mara, and this is also a threat to Signe: “In Signe’s mind, Mara stretched and grew, upwards and outwards, from pixie

to giant, from baby to adult” (Logan, 2018: 155). After Bee’s death and Islay’s departure, Mara is the only child left for her, and her relationship with Pearl means that she and Peter will be left alone. When children turn into adults, they leave their family and in fairy tales when finding a lover, the family is put aside. On the other hand, Mara’s perspective illustrates the recent representation popularly made of selkies. Mara sees Pearl as a saviour. Pearl drags her out of a life in which there is the constant reminder of Bee’s death to show her what the world looks like. Moreover, Pearl shows Mara what it feels to be cared about and to have someone believe you are the most beautiful creature in the world. Pearl serves Mara as a channel not only to understand the world, but also to understand who she is and to appreciate herself. With Pearl, childhood is abandoned to construct Mara’s identity as an adult. Logan plays with both popular representations of selkies through the figure of Pearl to portray how perspectives can change reality.

2.2.4 Opposing the Happily Ever After

The goal in every folktale was for the girl to find a suitable husband. The only priority and concern for these females was to get married, and therefore, there was little attention put into self-development or identity. Moreover, the greatest achievement was to marry a member of royalty or someone who could provide you with a life of luxuries. In *The Gloaming*, Logan criticises this obsession with marriage and suitable partners through a more contemporary representation of what sentimental relationships are like. To begin with, the homosexual relationship that Pearl and Mara have, represents a complete rejection of the patriarchal ideas usually transmitted in tales. Tradition has not accepted the existence of homosexuals, therefore, the LGTB collective has been silenced. Logan provides them with a couple they can feel identified to as they represent their reality. As mentioned, in tales girls had to aim for rich or powerful boys who would take care of them. This would result in females taking care of the household and children.

However, Logan presents not only a lesbian relationship, but also a partner who is not especially wealthy. Pearl works in showbusiness and as she describes how her shows are usually delivered in restaurants or hotels. There is no glamour in her job, and she is not going to provide Mara with a fancy life. They will have to work hard and go from one place to another to earn a salary.

Nonetheless, what Pearl does provide Mara with is love and affection. In opposition to tradition, their relationship is not one of submission and inferiority. Instead, their relationship is one in which both of them are equals. Logan tries to provide a contemporary representation of a relationship based on respect. As fairy tales once made girls aim for prince charming, Logan tries to promote a desire for healthy relationships. Another aspect of relationships to which Logan purposes a change is the representation of the actual relationship. Tales usually ended with the wedding of the couple, after knowing each other for approximately a couple of days. This was the case for many ladies, for example Cinderella, who after dancing one night with the prince became engaged with him the next time, they encountered each other again. Logan doesn't end the narration after Pearl and Mara kiss, instead she explores the nature of a long-term relationship with its difficult periods as well as the happy ones: "We are a normal fucking couple who have fucking fights and fuck to make up after" (Logan, 2018: 260). Coming back to the island, Mara becomes distant towards Pearl as she becomes aware of the reality of her family. She becomes resentful because she is the reason, she left the island, and now she is back it is placing its power upon her and her feelings: "Being in love with a selkie is like stepping on glass all day, every day. And It was true: Pearl did make her feel like she was dying." (Logan, 2018: 262). However, the final storm and its rendering powers erase these feelings of bitterness. The reader is not given a happy ending in which their life is sorted, on the other hand, Mara and Pearl are given a new opportunity to make their relationship work: "I wanted them to love one another still [...] Is that enough?" "I don't know", said

Pearl. [...] ‘But it’s something’” (Logan, 2018: 299). The novel allows the audience to see a real depiction of a relationship, rejecting subordinating ideals of patriarchy towards females.

2.2.5 The Power of the Sea

The novel begins with the Ross siblings giving their secrets to the sea, as an offering: “Let the sea take it” (Logan, 2018: 6). Water is another character in Mara’s world. The island is surrounded by it, and therefore, there is a strong connection with its inhabitants. The Ross family, in particular, seems to have a particular deal with it. Signe and Peter chose this island to raise their kids somewhere safe. However, in exchange for their life in the island they have to pay a price, Bee’s life: “The sea takes everything” (Logan, 2018: 52). From that moment, Mara develops a fear towards water as it is a constant reminder of how she couldn’t save her little brother. Pearl allows her to overcome this fear and come to terms with it. In the past, the sea had broken her family and her life, but next to Pearl water meant love and independence. Nonetheless, islands have an especial attraction: “No matter how much she tried to cut herself off from the island, it was still there. The further away she got, the closer she grew to it.” (Logan, 2018: 145). This power is constantly overshadowing the Ross family. They unburden themselves by shouting their secrets to the sea, but it is not until the end of the novel that they pay their debts off.

Once the Ross’ females are back together on the island, events rush on to the finale. After Signe finally recognises her inability to keep carrying all that sadness, the sea gives her back Bee’s bones. This comforts Signe, because as a mother, now she knows where his bones are, and she could take care of him one last time. This serves as a liberation to her, as she is now able to rest and let her daughter be free. It is not this moment in which she casts aside her bitterness towards Pearl: “You’re good [...] For Mara, I should have said that before.” (Logan, 2018: 291). All her sorrow and pain are liberated and she is

finally ready to be reunited with Peter and Bee. It is right after the moment in which she reunites with Peter in the cliff that the storm begins. This storm serves as a way to undo all the changes that the Ross family had caused to the island. The storm left the Ross house exactly as it was before they started to fix it; the bridge that had been recently build to connect the island with the mainland was destroyed and finally, the cliff collapsed into the sea, the statues “flung far from the island” (Logan, 2018: 301). Once its job was finished the storm came to an end. This tempest re-established a balance on the island, to leave everything as it was before the Ross family took things from it. The house returned to its original state, to free Mara and Islay from the burden that their parents started when they moved to the island, which was the renovation of the old house. The bridge was destroyed, to let the island maintain its essence. It would have meant the end of its magic with the entrance of the real world. Finally, the cliff disappeared, to free the island’s population from that constant reminder of death. The storm meant a new beginning for the Ross’ girls and gave back its magic essence to their island.

3. Conclusion

This dissertation has offered an analysis of the contemporary novel by Kirsty Logan, *The Gloaming*. A narrative located in a remote Scottish island, in which the Ross family and magic elements coexist within a blurry distinction between reality and fantasy. As the author has recognised, her novel is the result of the stories she was told as a toddler and feminist authors from the 20th century. The aim was to analyse how the main characteristics seen in fairy tales had been translated into a contemporary context using the techniques introduced in the 20th century.

In order to deliver this analysis, I have presented some research on 20th century retellers of tales. As one of Logan’s main influence, the main focus on this section was placed upon Angela Carter. This author is best known as the creator of revolutionary

versions of traditional tales such as 'The Beauty and The Beast'. In these versions, Carter presented criticism upon patriarchist and contemporary problematics using the traditional styles. In this section, the main deconstructions of the tales are analysed in order to understand how traditional motifs can be translated into contemporaneity. Next, a connection is drawn with Kirsty Logan's style so parallelisms can be seen with her novel and the techniques used in the 20th century. Moreover, as Scottish tales were part of her narration, some of the most well-known stories from the Caledonian region are presented, as they serve as a prelude to the analysis carried out on the following sections. The last sections of this dissertation are dedicated to the study of the main motifs in *The Gloaming*. Modern issues such as queer love, family relationships and the representation of female characters are scrutinised in order to understand how they have been adapted from the common topics present in traditional tales. This dissertation suggests that Logan did not only change the folkloric representations, but also, in some cases she avoided presenting a reinterpretation in order to present a critique to the patriarchal control of popular narrations.

Due to the recent publication of the novel, little research has been done on it. The initial sections are based on critical research on the literary movement of the 20th century on the revision of traditional tales. On the other hand, the last sections of this dissertation are the result of my own analysis and investigation of the traditional genre's modification in the novel because of the lack of critical material. This has been achieved through the collection of data that could be connected to the topics studied, and a personal inquiry on the novel.

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